

For discussion
on 13 February 2017

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

Social Welfare Service Support for Street Sleepers

Purpose

This paper sets out the social welfare service support for street sleepers.

Preface

2. Street sleeping is a complex social problem, involving policies of various bureaux and departments. Government departments and local welfare organisations have been in collaboration to assist street sleepers and enhance their motivation to receive support so as to persuade them to quit street sleeping. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) is mindful of the welfare needs of street sleepers, and has been providing relevant social welfare support services for them through various means.

Estimation of the Number of Street Sleepers

3. To keep track of the support service demand of street sleepers, SWD has set up a computerised Street Sleepers Registry (SSR) to capture street sleepers' particulars, and update SSR's information and data through SWD's service units and the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) specialised in serving street sleepers. SWD and the service units of NGOs specialised in serving street sleepers have to register newly confirmed street sleeper cases in SSR, and de-register cases upon confirmation of their cessation of street sleeping. As at end-December 2016, the number of street sleepers registered in SSR was 908.

Social Welfare Support Services for Street Sleepers rendered by SWD

Integrated Services Team for Street Sleepers

4. Since 2004, SWD subvents the Salvation Army (SA), St. James' Settlement (SJS) and the Christian Concern for the Homeless Association (CCHA) for each of them to operate an Integrated Services Team for Street Sleepers (IST). ISTs provide street sleepers with integrated services, including day and late-night outreaching visits, emergency shelter/short-term accommodation, counselling, employment support/guidance, personal care (e.g. bathing, haircut and meal, etc.), emergency relief fund to cover various expenses (e.g. short-term payment of rent and living costs, rental deposit, other removal expenses), and service referrals, etc. Through the provision of a wide range of support services, ISTs aim to address the emergency needs of street sleepers and enhance their work motivation and skills, so as to help them quit street sleeping and become self-reliant.

5. In response to the societal condition as well as changes in the characteristics and needs of street sleepers, ISTs initiate new service approaches and programmes continuously in order to better meet the service needs of street sleepers. For instance, SA, with its emphasis on engaging street sleepers and enhancing their motivation to receive support services through outreaching service, has implemented the "Health & Care Express – Mobile Service Station for Street Sleepers", which is a project involving collaboration with the medical and health care sectors for providing holistic care to street sleepers who have physical or mental problems, or become unemployed for three months or above consecutively. SJS, making use of an increase in the area and number of places of its short-term hostel in 2016-17, has re-arranged the hostel design/setting to cater for the special needs of the elderly street sleepers, so that they could receive more appropriate care during their stay in the hostel. CCHA has also enhanced the support facilities of its hostel for addressing the increasing number of female street sleepers in its service scope and, through early intervention and counselling during their stay in hostels, strengthened their confidence and capacity for quitting street sleeping.

Integrated Family Service Centres / Integrated Services Centres

6. The 65 Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and the two Integrated Services Centres (ISCs) over the territory operated by SWD or

NGOs provide services to street sleepers, including outreaching, counselling, crisis intervention, enquiry service and service referral, etc. Social workers of IFSCs/ISCs render services to street sleepers or refer them to appropriate services in accordance with their welfare needs upon thorough case assessments. These include provision of short-term financial assistance, referrals of application for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA), arrangement for admission to suitable hostels operated by NGOs or private institutions, or assistance for applying public rental housing, etc.

Short-term Accommodation Arrangement

7. To address the emergency and short-term accommodation needs of street sleepers, SWD subvents six NGOs, namely SA, SJS, CCHA, Pok Oi Hospital (POH), Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council (NAAC) and Caritas – Hong Kong (Caritas) to operate urban hostels for single persons and emergency shelters, and provides 20 additional accommodation places through reallocation of resources in 2016-17. At present, the five urban hostels operated by SA, SJS, POH, NAAC and Caritas (one of which concurrently provides self-financing places) and the three urban emergency shelters operated by CCHA (two of which concurrently provide self-financing places) provide a total of 222 subvented places. Besides, Street Sleepers' Shelter Society Trustees Incorporated (SSSSTI), Missionaries of Charity and CCHA operate five hostels on a self-financing basis, together with the three aforementioned subvented hostels/emergency shelters which concurrently provide self-financing places, there is a provision of altogether 408 self-financing places. The total number of subvented/self-financing places providing temporary accommodation for street sleepers is 630. During their stay in the hostels, responsible social workers will assist street sleepers to identify long term accommodation or appropriate residential care. While the hostel placement normally lasts for a maximum period of six months, responsible social workers will closely review their conditions and consider extending their stay in hostel having regard to individual circumstances, so as to assist them to transit to long term accommodation arrangement smoothly.

Care and Support Networking Team

8. SWD also subvents the Society for Community Organization to run the Care and Support Networking Team to assist street sleepers and other vulnerable groups to reintegrate into the community through the provision of outreaching service, casework counselling and group work

services.

Short-term Food Assistance Service Projects

9. Since February 2009, SWD subvents NGOs to operate the Short-term Food Assistance Service Projects (the Service Projects) to provide food assistance to needy persons, including street sleepers. From February 2009 to November 2016, a total of 3 645 street sleepers received assistance under the Service Projects.

Comprehensive Social Security Assistance

10. Street sleepers with financial hardship may apply to SWD for CSSA. The aim of the CSSA is to provide a safety net for families or individuals who cannot support themselves financially because of old age, disability, illness, unemployment, low income, etc., so as to enable them to meet their basic needs.

Health Care Services

11. For health care services, street sleepers in need can approach the Hospital Authority (HA) or the Department of Health for medical and mental health services. Apart from CSSA recipients who are entitled to have free medical treatment at public hospitals or clinics, other street sleepers who are unable to pay the fees due to financial difficulties may approach ISTs or IFSCs/ISCs for assistance in arranging medical fee reduction.

12. In addition, SWD has set up the Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness (ICCMWs) across the territory since 2010 to provide community mental health support services for those in need. Social workers of ISTs can refer cases to ICCMWs or HA's Community Psychiatric Nursing Services, and arrange those cases to be followed up by HA's Psychiatric Specialist Out-Patient Clinics.

Advice Sought

13. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

Social Welfare Department
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